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LETTER DATED 25 SEPTEMBER 1991 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF CANADA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to attach a statement from the Secretary of State for External Affairs of Canada, Mrs. Barbara McDougall, on the situation in Yugoslavia, which is currently before the Security Council. I would be grateful if you would circulate this communication as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) L. Yves FORTIER, C.C., Q.C.
Ambassador and
Permanent Representative

Annex

Statement by the Secretary of State for External Affairs of Canada on the situation in Yugoslavia

Canada, among other countries, has asked that the Security Council meet to consider the situation in Yugoslavia.

The situation today in Yugoslavia is precarious. The cease-fire is fragile, and there is still the danger of a conflict degenerating into a full-scale civil war. Hundreds of lives have already been lost, and hundreds of thousands of people have already been displaced. Civil authority at the federal level has effectively collapsed. Every day that passes without negotiation and conciliation increases the prospects of further recourse to bloodshed. Events in that tragic and divided country now pose a direct challenge to the essential purposes for which the United Nations was founded.

The concept of sovereignty is, of course, fundamental to statehood. And the law and practice of decades have argued against any steps or measures which could be construed as intervention in the internal affairs of Member States. It has been on this basis that the Security Council has refrained in other cases from taking action which it is empowered by the Charter to undertake in the event of international conflict. But the concept of sovereignty must respect higher principles. The time has now passed when the wanton destruction of human life is a matter of purely internal consideration.

The situation in Yugoslavia poses a direct threat to international peace and security in the area. The collapse of effective governing authority in Yugoslavia, if it continues, could exacerbate the degree of civil strife and further endanger the peace and security of neighbouring countries. It poses a direct challenge to the principles enshrined in the Charter of Paris and the aspirations of all CSCE participating States for the peaceful settlement of disputes.

The parties to the conflict have, to their credit, recognized the wider ramifications of the crisis, and have accepted assistance from other countries aimed at ending the violence, restoring peace and security, and ensuring an equitable and durable solution to the conflict. Neighbouring countries have also shown a high degree of restraint, which has helped to prevent violence from spreading beyond the borders of Yugoslavia.

The European Community, working under the broad auspices of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, has been relentless in its efforts to bring about a stable cease-fire and to mediate the conflict. Canada fully supports the indefatigable efforts of the Netherlands EC presidency. We have been proud to participate in the CSCE-mandated EC monitoring mission. We continue to believe that these efforts must be given every possible chance of success.

But, as one broken cease-fire has succeeded another, it has become evident that there is a need for the United Nations to add its weight and authority to that of the CSCE and the EC. It must reiterate and re-emphasize the CSCE declaration that differences within Yugoslavia must be resolved by peaceful negotiation fully consistent with the Helsinki Principles of the CSCE. Territorial gains or changes within Yugoslavia brought about by violence are unacceptable.

The European approach to this problem can still succeed if this Council acts to place this approach explicitly within the framework of Chapter VIII of the Charter and expresses the will of the entire international community that violence must cease.

But there is more that can and must be done by this Council, and by the Members of the United Nations. The Council must help persuade the warring parties to stop fighting and to do so without preconditions regarding the future shape of the country. It must call for a return to negotiations involving all of the parties to the conflict. It must also offer its willingness to help in the facilitation of such negotiations. Canada believes that the peace conference on Yugoslavia, under the able chairmanship of Lord Carrington, is the most immediate instrument to achieve a settlement. This draft resolution appropriately invites the Secretary-General to play a role in the peace process. We believe that his efforts could be instrumental in finding a solution, as they have in so many previous crises.

In the present circumstances, it would be madness to permit continued trade in armaments to Yugoslavia, and the draft before you rightly proposes a general and complete embargo on such deliveries.

Canada supports these measures, and we urge the adoption of this draft resolution.

In looking ahead to our hopes at a peaceful resolution of this conflict, it may well be appropriate for the United Nations to act more directly. If the circumstances require the deployment of peace-keepers, Canada will be prepared to do its part.

Let us hope that Security Council action today, and redoubled efforts by the parties to the conflict and the EC, will achieve a settlement to mark a triumph over the narrow forces of a bygone era.